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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR NEA/ARPI (TROBERTS), NEA/PI(LSHULTZ)  
ABU DHABI FOR MEPI (HWECHSEL)

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TAGS: [SOCI](#) [KMPI](#) [KWMN](#) [SCUL](#) [PGOV](#) [ELAB](#) [MU](#) [MEPI](#)

SUBJECT: WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION PLEADS FOR MEPI PROGRAMS

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Summary  
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1. (SBU) The provincial head of an Omani Women's Association chapter in Salalah is hungry for greater MEPI engagement that might better train the women of that region for jobs in a modern, diverse environment. Highlighting the cultural differences between Dhofari women and those in Muscat, she identified cross-cultural awareness as being on par with English language and computer skills among the traits most lacking within the female workforce. Leading employers in the region share her assessment. End summary.

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Salalah Women Need MEPI  
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2. (SBU) Noor al-Ghassani (protect), President of the Omani Women's Association (OWA) chapter in Salalah, told PolOff on April 17 that she is desperate for any MEPI programming in her region, particularly in the areas of computer literacy, English language, presentation skills, and business/accounting basics. Al-Ghassani highlighted the cultural and educational differences between Salalah and Muscat when considering developing programs for women of Oman's southern Dhofar region. She stressed the lack of higher education and English language skills as obstacles to both MEPI programming and women's employment in Salalah.

3. (SBU) In addition to the lack of basic skills development such as computer literacy, al-Ghassani suggested that significant cultural differences continue to hamper the promotion and success of women in the workforce. In addition to needed business skills, al-Ghassani reported that providing fundamental cross-cultural training and workplace orientation to acclimatize women to a diverse, international business community is of equal importance. At least one Omani businessman concurred, going so far as to say that his company will not hire women who continue to wear the traditional full-face covering so common in the Dhofar region. He believes that the covering prohibits effective communication and prevents most women from promotion to higher ranks within companies. (Note: Another major employer in the region said that it has had to relocate a woman employee, twice, from a secretarial position where she was the only lady in the office. The employer has re-advertised the position, for the third time, and will now only hire a male secretary. End note.)

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Seeking Ways to Help  
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4. (SBU) In an effort to promote more engagement with the OWA Salalah chapter, the Embassy will endeavor, whenever possible, to include participants from there in future Muscat events, and possibly to tailor future MEPI programs specifically for Salalah's needs. Al-Ghassani said greater involvement with MEPI would help identify qualified women from the local business community interested in networking with women from Muscat. She said there is no shortage of rising stars in the region, only a shortage of opportunities.  
BALTIMORE